



THE PASTEBOARD BOX

By Fred'k. Hamm

THE CLOSING of the tall double doors shut out the late street noises and the heavy voices of the policemen. Alan Martels stood in the dimly lit old-fashioned vestibule and leaned his head against the loudly-flowered wall paper. With his eyes closed, he heard the disapproving voice of Williams, the elderly manservant.

"Your brother wishes to see you before you go up, Mr. Alan."

Martels' eyes opened. "No kidding," he drawled. "Good old Walter wants to see his brother. His twin brother, for whom he feels the inordinate affection usual between twin brothers. Ah, yes."

Williams eyed his torn white shirt and shredded necktie. One lapel had

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By

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been partially torn away from the well-made tweed jacket.

"Will you step into the study, Mr. Alan?"

Alan appeared to think it over.

"Yes," he sighed, "I guess I will. Okay, lead on, MacWilliams, you hoary old household retainer, key-hole peeper and general woolgatherer. The mahster awaits!"

Lips compressed, Williams opened a dark carved wooden door and revealed a brightly lit room that was part library, part office.

The man sitting at the long walnut table raised his eyes from a sheet of stationery and regarded the figure in the doorway.

They were as like as two new-minted coins in facial features, the same long heads, with thinning black hair on top and jutting, square chins, the same wide, thin-lipped mouths, slender noses and blue eyes under heavy black brows.

The man at the table, impeccable in coffee-brown gabardines, with speckless kerchief tucked into a breast pocket, surveyed his twin's battered clothing, flushed face and bloodshot eyes for a long moment. When he spoke, face and voice both were unemotional.

"You'd better go to bed, Alan, and sleep it off. You seem to have done rather better than usual, this time. What was it—a girl, or a game of cards?"

His brother's gaze flickered on the cold eyes behind the desk, slid off them. Without a word, he turned to go.

"One moment, Alan."

He turned back toward the desk.

"You realize, of course, Alan, that this kind of thing cannot continue indefinitely." He paused and cleared his throat. "I shall have to stop your allowance, Alan."

Alan twitched as though touched by a live wire. His chin came up with a jerk and his eyes focussed on the speaker.

"Just what might that crack mean?" He inquired, almost in a whisper.

There was the faintest suggestion of malicious satisfaction about the thin lips.

"I thought it a fairly simple statement. I'll elaborate: no more money, until you can learn the value of money. You can live very well here at home; all your necessities will be—"

"You dirty, stinking, incredibly mean little rat!" Alan Martels spat the epithets into the unmoving face across the table, his hands clutching the far rim, his upper body projected halfway across the mass of books and papers.

"That's not going to get you anything, Alan."

"You filthy, loathsome, boot-licking little tin prig!"

Walter Martels smiled with stiff lips, and said nothing.

Alan drew back from the table. He opened his mouth as if to speak again, shut it, moved his feet indecisively, and burst out: "Damn it, Walter! You've got no right to take that line with me." He was

almost crying. "He was *my* father, too. Part of that money belongs to me! You can't just turn it on and off like a spigot, as you please!"

"As it happens, I legally *can* do just that."

"Boy, you must have given the old man a real servicing to get yourself named executor before he kicked off!" Alan went into unprintable detail.

Walter Martels paled slightly, but he did not move in his chair.

"The fact that you were in jail for forgery at the time undoubtedly influenced him," he remarked.

"That's right, throw that up to me again."

The man behind the desk picked up a sheaf of bound legal papers. "You'd better get to bed. I'll hear anything more you care to say in the morning. Good night."

He ignored Alan and began to make pencil notations on the margin of the top document. The brother stood helplessly for a moment.

"Damn you!" he shrieked suddenly.

As Walter's composed face lifted to stare at him, he repeated: "Damn you to hell!"

There were running footsteps in the hallway, and Williams' astonished features came through the door.

"Did you call, Mr.—"

"You know damned well he didn't, you eavesdropping old fool!"

He swung back to the man at the desk.

"You know what you can do with

your money, Walter. I'm through! I'm fed to the ears with your nauseating platitudes, and I'm clearing out! I'm getting out, and to hell with you, brother!"

He shoved the gaping Williams violently aside, strode from the room with the torn lapel flapping, and the two left behind heard the heavy front door slam.

"Good lord, Mr. Walter!" Williams was awestruck. "What do you fancy he meant . . .?"

Walter Martels stood up and yawned. "I think I'll turn in, Williams. You might bring a glass of warm milk up to me. Put some salt in it, please."

AS LONG as he was visible from the house, Alan Martels walked at furious speed down the long block of identical old brownstone fronts. At the end of the block he turned the corner and slowed to a saunter.

Presently a cruising taxi appeared, and swerved in to the curb at his signal.

Alan got in and sank back against the cushions.

"Twenty-third Street ferry," he said.

At the brightly-lit ferry slip he went aboard the waiting boat and mounted the dingy, brass-treaded stairs to the upper stern deck. A handful of belated commuters were inhaling the damp, creosote-flavored air.

Alan lit a cigarette and paced to and fro across the deck in an agitated manner. One or two of the com-

muters eyed him curiously.

The whistle emitted some raw-throated blasts, the whole boat quivered, and the ferry slid out of the slip with a great churning of water against the pilings. The docked-in shore of Manhattan Island receded rapidly behind the smoothly laboring vessel. The towers of the financial district sectioned the glare-lit clouds.

Alan stood by the rail. Presently he bowed his head on his arms. The outside riders nudged one another and stared.

The boat was now a good third of the distance across the Hudson. Alan removed his battered gray hat and laid it on the deck beside him. Then, climbing up onto the splintery railing, he leaped outward, above the darkly shining waters.

Just before he struck the billowing paddle-wash, he heard the first shouts and screams from the deck above.

TRADITIONALLY, Williams had Saturday afternoon off. He was a charter member of a select organization of housemen, valets, butlers, chauffeurs and other branches of the service professions, which met sedately at an address on Madison Avenue at 7 p. m. every Saturday night. The time between two o'clock and the meeting of his club, Williams habitually filled in with small errands, a western movie and dinner at a Chinese restaurant on 42nd Street. He regarded the eating of Chinese food as something rather

risqué, but safe enough if done only once a week.

This Saturday, he stepped off the stoop of the Martels brownstone at 2:02 p. m., derby on head and tightly-rolled black umbrella in hand, and cat-footed away along the quiet crosstown street.

When his decently-clad figure had turned the corner and disappeared, Alan Martels stepped out of an area-way across the street and went over to the front door. Using his key, he let himself in, closed the door softly behind him, and rapped on the study door.

"Come in, Williams," Walter's voice answered, from beyond the door. As the door opened, he added, "I thought you'd gone."

Then he looked up and saw Alan in the doorway.

"Hello, Walter," Alan said.

His twin's mouth opened and closed. His manicured fingers gripped the polished table-edge, but he did not move.

Alan smiled slightly.

"What's the matter, Walter? You look as though you'd seen a ghost."

His brother's face was rapidly becoming its expressionless self. "Naturally," he said, his voice cracking only a little "when I read in the papers . . ."

"That I'd committed suicide?" Alan laughed. "Well, I changed my mind. No future in suicide."

The telephone rang.

"Don't tell anyone I'm here!" Alan Martels' voice carried a sudden menacing implication.

Walter gave him a glance and picked up the instrument. "Yes, this is Mr. Martels. Yes. Yes, I told your salesperson it arrived here broken . . . How should I know? I didn't break it. . . . Yes, it's still in the box it came in I'll send you the pieces if you like . . . Very well, suit yourself about that. It's not the money, it's the principle of the thing, I always say . . . Yes, you can send another one out, then. I'm going out of town, but there'll be someone here to receive it . . . All right, all right!"

He hung up, wiped his lips with the crisp kerchief from his breast pocket, and returned the kerchief to the pocket again. His cold ascendancy, shattered briefly, was rapidly re-establishing itself between them.

"What was that?" Alan Martels snapped.

Walter smiled. "Oh, the call? Nothing—just a broken goldfish bowl."

"Goldfish bowl!! Those stinking fancy fish of yours upstairs. Of course."

Walter Martels talked, the merest hint of wariness in his eyes as he watched his brother steadily. "I ordered a larger one. When it came this morning it was smashed to bits in the box. They were arguing about sending me a new one, too! It's not—"

"It's not the principle of the thing, it's the money. I know."

Walter didn't smile. "Naturally. People don't appreciate the value of money. Look at the way it came

out—there, in that big square carton. All smashed up."

He waved at a large pasteboard box on the floor beside the desk.

"They're sending another out, though."

Alan chuckled disbelievingly.

"That's certainly like you, Walter. At the last minute you're worrying about a lousy five-dollar—"

"Nine eighty-five."

"Fine. At the last minute you're worrying about a nine eighty-five—"

"What do you mean—the last minute . . . ?"

Something was happening between them. Now the ascendancy was ebbing from Walter's side of the table.

"What do I mean?" Alan was elaborately casual. "Well, you just said yourself you were leaving town."

"Oh, that—uh, yes. Why, Alan, I was terribly upset when I read this morning that you had—that you were—"

"I'm sure you were, Walter." His voice dripped sarcasm. "Where were you going, Walter?"

"Well, I hadn't made up my mind. I just wanted to—get away . . ." He pulled out the kerchief and dabbed again at his lips. Alan's eyes narrowed at the gesture.

"Clearing the papers out of the desk, too," he commented, taking in the room at a glance.

Walter did not return the kerchief to his pocket. He twisted it in his fingers. "I was thinking of doing some work while I was away—look

here, what business is this of yours? You've no right—"

"Or were you thinking of *staying* away for awhile?" Alan leaned across the table toward him. "Because you're afraid someone might ask questions about *why* I jumped in the river, and the answers might make you look like the nasty little heel you are?"

Walter drew himself up. "No such notion ever entered my head!"

"You always were yellow when the chips were down."

"Alan!" Walter Martels came to his feet behind the table. "That's enough! Don't forget, I'm still the legal administrator—"

Alan smiled at him. "Truer words you never spoke, brother dear. And I wouldn't bother cleaning any more papers out of the desk, either."

"And why not?" His voice cracked weirdly on the "why." His eyes were on Alan, and they were frightened eyes, now. They followed Alan as he came slowly around the end of the table.

Walter pushed back the swivel chair.

"Because you won't be doing any work where you're going, Walter."

His lips smiled but his voice was a dead, toneless level. He came toward Walter.

The man in the brown garbardines, so like the deadly-faced man in rough, water-stained clothing, backed away before him. The well-kept hands came out a little in front of him.

"Alan . . ." The word strangled in

his throat. "What are you going . . . to . . ."

"This!"

There was a solid "smack!" as his fist smashed into his twin brother's jaw.

Walter screamed, a note of tears in his voice. Awkwardly, he raised his arms, too late to block the next vicious blow. His head was jerked around on the axis of his neck as though with wires, and his body turned with it, off balance. Walter's legs bent like wet macaroni, then, and the third blow sent him staggering loosely across the room. He crashed into a steel filing cabinet. One hand clutched the cabinet, and his chin came up. His eyes focussed on Alan's advancing form, on the contorted face and the balled fist drawn back, and dilated with terror. A thin hoarse scream tore from his throat.

"No, no . . . oh, no . . . no, Alan . . ."

The fist crashed into his face.

Alan's foot drove into his ribs as he slid down the filing cabinet, and he gasped. Another kick struck his neck, slamming his temple against a sharp-edged knob. After that there were more blows and more kicks but Walter Martels no longer felt them.

ALAN MARTELS rested in the chair at the table, his chest still rising and falling from his exertions.

Once his fingers toyed fleetingly with some of the correspondence on the table.

"Legal administrator," he mumbled, grinning faintly. At last he heaved himself onto his feet. Going out into the hallway, he tried the front door; it was locked. He checked the back door. Then, climbing the back stairs, he went along the upper hallway and into Walter's room.

It was a large, high-ceiled room with heavy walnut furnishings. Against one wall two long tanks held water and blank-eyed, brilliant-hued fish. Alan opened a closet and took out a freshly pressed coffee-brown garbardine suit. He washed and shaved in the adjoining bathroom, chose shirt, socks and necktie to match the suit and got into the clothes.

He was inspecting the results, as reflected from a long mirror, when he noted a cabinet photograph lying face down on the bureau. He turned it over.

A brown-haired girl looked at him from the picture, long eyes and a full, red mouth curved in a smile. Across the lower edge a feminine hand had written: "To my fiancé, Walter, with all my love, Helene."

Alan was regarding the photograph with frowning concentration when a bell rang sharply downstairs, the clangor echoing through the quiet house.

Tightening his lips and walking primly, Alan descended the stairs and crossed the hall to the front door. He unlocked it, to reveal a uniformed parcel-delivery messenger, impatiently juggling a large paste-

board box.

"Mr. Walter Martels?" he snapped.

"I am Walter Martels, yes."

"Sign here."

When he had tucked pencil under cap and run back to his truck, Alan hefted the box. Suddenly recollection flooded his face.

"Goldfish bowl!" he said softly, grinning. He locked the door, carried the box into the study and set it on the floor. "Here's your goldfish bowl, Walter," he said, to the still figure crumpled pathetically against the filing cabinet. He chuckled and, sitting again at the table, flicked the playback switch on the dictaphone beside the chair.

The record buzzed for a moment, then Walter's voice spoke from the instrument. "Norton and Connors, Investment Brokers, Ten Wall Street, New York City," it said, as Alan listened intently. "Gentlemen: I am in receipt of your letter suggesting the purchase of one thousand shares of Continental Preferred. Although this may seem a wise move, from your point of view . . ."

He played the record again and again. Occasionally he repeated the words himself, aloud, aping the dead man's tricks of speech and vocal mannerisms.

"How do you do, sir," he said aloud, to the empty room. "I wonder if you could give me the amount of my cash balance—just roughly, of course. I'll only need about one hundred thousand. You see, sir, I've just murdered my brother—that's

right, I said murdered—and I feel that a few years in Mexico would benefit my health. Thank you, sir. How understanding you are. And now, sir, if you will excuse me—I must do a few little services for my dear, dead brother."

Alan Martels switched off the dictaphone. Taking off the brown jacket, he knelt on the floor beside the body. With some difficulty he got it across his shoulders. Staggering a little with its weight, he made his way slowly up the narrow front stairway and into the upstairs bathroom.

He dumped the body in the bathtub, and locked the bathroom door.

Then he went to work.

IT WAS early evening when Alan Martels, wearing natty brown gabardines, his right shoulder sagging from the weight of the big suitcase he carried, walked onto the Dyckman Street ferry. He remained standing on the lower deck, aft, as the boat pulled out for its shuttle to the Jersey shore. He balanced his suitcase on the rail, as if to rest his elbows on it, and stared dreamily at the panorama of Manhattan rimming the evening skies. Nearly halfway across, the suitcase slipped. Before he could prevent it, the luggage had fallen off the rail and splashed in the water. It disappeared almost instantly, as if it were weighted. Martels gave every evidence of a man helplessly distraught. Unfortunately there were no other passengers on the after deck at the moment to witness

his excellent performance.

He rode back from Jersey on the same boat. An hour later, on the Forty-Second Street ferry, his luck with a suitcase was equally bad.

Remarkably cheerful for a man who has just lost two apparently valuable pieces of luggage beyond recovery, he unlocked the door of his house just as the clock on a nearby church sounded the quarter-hour before eleven.

In the upstairs bathroom once again, he pondered over what to do with the only part of Walter Martels which had refused to fit into either of the two suitcases. A head is an object inconveniently shaped for packaging. He sat on the edge of the bath tub, smoking a cigarette, his eyes blank.

Suddenly he stood up and ran down the stairs to the study. Snatching up the large pasteboard box, he stripped off the heavy brown paper wrappings, working fast and furiously . . .

He had finished, come downstairs with the box and was re-wrapping it to look like an ordinary, prosaic parcel, when he heard a key rattling in the front-door lock.

He had just time to replace the box where it had been, smooth his hair, put on Walter's brown jacket and sit down behind the table before Williams' discreet knock sounded on the study door.

"Come in, Williams," he said.

The houseman entered, minus his derby and umbrella.

"Good evening, Mr. Walter," he

said.

"Good evening, Williams." Alan became engrossed in a pile of legal documents.

"Can I bring you anything before retiring, sir?"

"Er—no, thank you, Williams. Nothing."

"Very good, sir."

He did not leave the room. Alan looked up, and saw the servant's gaze directed at something beyond him.

"What are you looking at?"

The houseman's eyebrows elevated a fraction at the tone of the question. "Nothing, sir. Only noticing that the vase on the filing cabinet has fallen over. I'll take care of it, sir."

He cat-footed around the table, brushing against the re-wrapped box, and set a small blue vase upright atop the cabinet against which Walter Martels' body had smashed.

Alan sat tense. "Thank you, Williams. Good night."

"Mr. Walter!" Williams' voice was faintly chiding. "Your kerchief."

"Eh?" Alan looked up. Williams was regarding him distressfully. "In your breast-pocket, sir. No kerchief."

"Oh, of course. Silly of me. Well, too late tonight to matter, eh, Williams?"

"Yes, sir." He turned to go. "Good night, sir."

"Oh—er—Williams."

"Yes, sir?"

"I'm sorry to have to tell you this, Williams, but—well, as a matter of fact I'm going to have to let

you go."

The houseman's face showed real distress. "Oh, I'm sorry to hear it, sir . . ."

Alan played with a pen-holder. "Oh, quite the contrary. I've found our association—most pleasant. But—the death of my brother has been quite a shock, of course . . ."

"Of course, sir."

"I'm going away. I don't know how long I shall be gone, or when I shall be back, or if I shall come back here at all. So—it seemed best, this way."

"Yes, sir. When will you be leaving, sir?"

"Within a few days. I'll make arrangements the first of the week about selling the house and the furniture."

"Yes, sir."

"My brother had his faults—we all do."

"I know how you feel, Mr. Walter." Williams nodded.

"But after all, Williams—he was my twin brother."

ALAN MARTELS balanced the box on the ferry-boat railing and drew a deep lungful of the fresh morning air. A brisk breeze whipped his face; sunlight danced on the rolling waters of the river across which plied other dark, squat ferries, sparsely loaded with Sunday morning passengers. A rusty-sided freighter nudged in toward her berth, abetted by a pair of fussy tugs.

Alan smiled and hefted the box

slightly between his hands. It had a solidity. Momentarily, his jaw muscles knotted and his hands squeezed the sides of the package slightly inward. Then he relaxed again and smiled quietly.

He let his hands lose contact with the rough wrappings of the box. It teetered on the rail . . .

"Hey! Look out, there!"

"Let go!" The shrill rage in Alan's voice shocked him back to caution, as the man who had shouted still kept hold of the box.

"I've got it," the man said. He looked curiously at Alan. "What's the matter . . .?"

"Nothing," Alan laughed. "Nothing. I—I just thought you were going to drop it."

The man laughed in turn. "I thought *you* were. Another second and you would have."

Alan smiled. "Absent-minded."

"Better not hold it on the rail that way, fellow."

"Yeah. Guess you're right. Thanks."

Jaw set, he turned away, carrying with him the pasteboard box.

Half an hour later, in Hoboken, the taxi in which he was riding squealed to a stop.

"Here y'are, Mac—Jefferson Hotel," rasped the driver in the dulcet Jersey accent.

Alan got out. "How much?"

"Sixty-five." The driver hummed and looked at the tops of the nearby buildings as Alan handed him a greenback. "Gee, t'anks, Mac."

Whistling, Alan walked through

the lobby of the Jefferson Hotel, where a radio brought church music on a doomful organ to a sprinkling of disinterested loungers, and out through the side entrance on a cross street. He stuck his hands in his pockets and whistled louder.

Brakes screeched at the curb beside him, a nerve-lacerating sound.

"Hully chee, Mac! Hey, ya left yuh . . ."

Alan kept on walking. The driver leaped out of the cab, carrying in his hand a large, brown-paper-wrapped box, and ran after Alan. "Hey! Mister! Hey!"

He came abreast of Alan. "What's a matter, Mac—hard of hearin'?"

Alan turned. "What do you—oh . . ."

"Here's yuh box, Mac. Yuh left in d'cab. Yuh lucky I caught yuh, Mac. Jus' happent turn up 'is side street. That box woulda end' up in lost 'n found. Wid d' mess they're in, yuh might never a-seen it ag'in."

Without a word, Alan took the box and walked away. In the next block he hailed a taxi.

"Where to, Mister?" queried the bored driver.

"The ferries."

"Which one, Mister? Lots o' ferries leave Hoboken. Some'll get me a fatter fare 'n some others."

"I don't care!" snarled Alan.

"Just take me to the nearest one. Just get me out of Hoboken! Go through the tunnel if you like!"

"Okay, Mister. Okay." Eyeing him guardedly, the driver engaged his

gears and they shot away.

THE TAXI stopped at the corner of the block of old brownstone houses, and Alan got out, and walked away, carrying the box.

"Hey, you! The driver's voice was furious. "That's be four seventy-five!" Then as Alan turned, wearily, he grumbled. "Drive yuh all 'a way from Joisey an' nen try t' welch on—"

He took the ten-spot. "Okay."

"Keep it," Alan said.

"Huh? Hey, dat's too—well, chee, Mister . . ."

Alan was walking toward the house. He passed a corner and looked around. The taxi was gone.

He stood above the large, open sewer drain aperture, inspecting it. Finally, he walked toward it. Just in front of it, he stumbled and dropped the box squarely in his path. An awkward kick, and the wrapped object slid into the opening beside the curb, and disappeared. A dull thump came up from the black interior.

Alan's shoulders straightened. With a light step, he walked on up the street to his house and let himself in.

In Walter's room—his room, rather—he mopped the vestiges of drying sweat from his face and forehead. He stripped, bathed, and put on clean clothes. As he adjusted a fresh necktie, his eye fell on the girl's picture. He snapped his fingers, turned, and ran out of the room.

In the study, he fumbled in several drawers of the large table, finally found a small, red-leather book with gilded leaf-edges. He opened it, turning the pages feverishly.

It was under "W" that he found the name—"Helene Winters, Rockledge Mansions Apartments."

He sat down, pulled a typewriter toward him on a movable table, ran a sheet of notepaper into the machine.

"Dearest Helene," he tapped, "It is difficult to write what follows. I am going away—for how long I cannot now say. My brother's death . . ."

The doorbell shrilled through the house.

He tore the paper from the machine, crumpled it in the waste basket, went to the door and opened it.

A pair of street urchins, barefoot, in soiled clothes and with smirched faces, stood on the stoop.

"That's him," one said.

He held out a large, square box, wrapped in brown paper, now stained with mud and streaked with water. "Guess this is yours, isn't it, mister?"

"I . . . uh . . . what?" Alan's voice sounded strangled.

"We was standing across the street when you dropped it," the boy explained, in a high, light voice, "and then we seen you come up to this house. We got some string an' a fish hook, and pulled it out."

"It is yours, ain't it?" the other urchin asked.

"No!" Alan exclaimed. "No! No!"

"You mean it *ain't* yours?"

"No!" Alan's voice broke. "I never saw it before in my life! Now beat it!"

"Oh," the kid said, blankly. Suddenly he brightened. He turned to his partner. "Then we can open it, huh, Johnnie?"

The words wrenched from Alan's throat. "No! Wait . . ."

"I dunno, Chick," the other boy said doubtfully, "maybe we oughta give it to the cops . . ."

"Give it to me!" Alan grabbed at the streaked, damply odoriferous package, redolent of the sewers.

The kid let go of the box, his eyes big and surprised. "But, mister, you said . . ."

"Never mind what I said! I made a mistake. I didn't recognize it!" He took possession of the box. "Now, beat it!"

The boys continued to regard him with bright-eyed interest.

"But—ain't you glad to get it back?" one asked.

Alan stared. "Oh—oh, sure!" He dug in a pocket. "Here," he said.

The urchin stared at the bill. "Gee—five bucks!! There must be di'monds in that box. Come on, Johnnie!"

Alan watched them run off down the quiet street, the smelly package dangling suddenly from his hand. Something that sounded like a sob bubbled from his lips.

All at once, bareheaded, he dashed down the steps and ran off along

the street, the box in his hand. A few Sunday strollers turned to stare at the hatless runner carrying the odd-looking package.

After several blocks, breathless and spent, he halted his mad race. Perspiration streaming into his arm-pits, his eye fell upon a sign down the street: "Drive-It-Urself".

A few minutes later, in a rented car, he neared the approaches to the George Washington Bridge. Parking, he got out and walked rapidly out onto the great span. When he reached the middle, he leaned casually over the railing allowing the box to dangle out in space, below the rail level. A quick glance to right and left, and he let go.

The box plummeted down through the air, falling swiftly, struck the water with a small, white splash, and disappeared. Alan Martels watched the spot for a few seconds. Then he walked quickly back to the car, got in, and drove back downtown.

He was smiling contentedly as he let himself into the house. He ran a finger tentatively around the sweaty skin under his collar, grimaced, and started up the stairs.

Brakes squalled in the street outside. A car's door slammed.

Alan halted halfway up the stairs. His head turned, he looked down at the front door.

The doorbell shrilled through the house. When it died away, the silence was sudden and oppressive.

Slowly, Alan Martels turned and walked downstairs, across the hallway and to the door. Keeping well

to the side, he peered out through the curtains on one of the narrow side windows flanking the door.

A sedan bearing the insignia of the police department stood at the curb. On the stoop, a few inches away through the window, stood two men. It was obvious that they were plainclothes policemen.

Hands working at his sides, his eyes wide and staring, Alan leaned against the wall without moving.

The bell rang a second time, a long, insistent ring.

A long, tremulous breath escaped him. He stood straight, adjusted his collar and tie. Then, stepping to the door, he opened it.

The two hard, expressionless faces of the law regarded him without emotion.

"Mr. Martels?" the taller of the two asked.

"Er—yes . . ."

"Lieutenant Burke from headquarters. Are you *Walter* Martels?"

"I—er—"

"I say, *are you Walter Martels?*"

"Yes," Alan said, "I'm Walter Martels. What can I do for you?"

"You know a young woman named Helene Winters?"

"Helene Winters? I—why, that is, of course. Uh—she's my fiancée."

The officer looked at his companion.

"I'm afraid you're going to have to come along with us, Mr. Martels."

"Come . . . with you . . . but why . . . ?"

"Because Helene Winters has been murdered. And I might as well tell

you now that anything you say will be used against you. The evidence is pretty—conclusive."

"That . . . I . . ."

"That you murdered her."

AFTER WHAT seemed like a long time, Alan Martels heard his own voice forming words and phrases.

"But I *didn't*—I *couldn't*—have killed her!"

"The apartment manager found her this morning." The tall, plain-faced young detective seemed to size up Alan before he went on. "The coroner reports she was killed sometime Friday night. You were seen entering the place that night and you were seen leaving. A gun registered to you was found in an ashcan two blocks away from her apartment house. What do you expect us to believe, Mr. Martels?"

What *do* I expect him to believe, Alan thought, while his stomach was shrinking into a tight crumpled ball like a shrunken cannibal head. After I've destroyed Alan Martels and made myself Walter Martels, what do I expect him to believe if I tell him I'm not Walter Martels, after all? I wonder if I could make a break for the rear door? No . . . they'd get me, they'd get me. I've got to think. Wait . . . wait . . .

He gave Lieutenant Burke back his keen probing look.

"I know how this is going to sound, Lieutenant. But there's been a horrible mistake." He rushed on. "I'm—I'm not Walter Martels. I'm

his brother. His twin brother, Alan."

The detectives exchanged significant glances.

"You mean," Burke said, speaking carefully, as to a child, "you're the one who committed suicide the other night. You're dead. Right?"

"You think I'm crazy, maybe." His voice was stronger, now, and steadier. "I don't blame you. Look—this is the truth—there was a mistake in the identification on my brother's suicide."

Burke stared at him, picking at his lower lip with thumb and forefinger. "You're trying now to tell us that that was Walter Martels who jumped off the boat, leaving Alan Martels' hat lying on the upper deck?"

"That's it, exactly."

He watched their faces in an agony of suspense.

"Supposing for a second that's true," Burke said smoothly, "just why was it that you didn't come to the police with a correction, the minute you knew about it?"

"Well—well, you see—" Alan lowered his eyes with becoming shame—"it—it was a question of money."

"Money . . . ?"

"My—that is *our* father left my brother Walter in control of his estate when he died." He gulped in a long breath and hurried on. "Walter hated me. He's always hated me. We never got along as boys. And he put me on an allowance, Lieutenant. I never had enough money for anything, do you see?"

He peered hard into Burke's face, his own face a mask of attempted self-justification. "So—well, it seemed like a heaven-sent chance, that's all, when I learned of his suicide. Why couldn't I just be my brother and take over the estate?"

"You made a quick change, all right." Burke consulted a notebook. "The suicide was Friday night. Our men were out here talking to 'Walter Martels' at six Saturday morning. Was that you they talked to?"

"Er—yes, it was."

Burke put away the notebook, shaking his head in what seemed to be reluctant admiration.

Suddenly he shot a question. "Why should your brother have been wearing your hat, with your name on the sweatband, that night of all nights?"

Alan was ready for that one.

"Because he hated me," he said calmly. "It was his last dirty trick on me. He was furiously angry with Helene. I know that. He loved her, but he was insanely jealous. Once I heard him say 'I can't live with her—or without her'. I think he must have suffered horrible remorse after he shot her. But even with that, his hatred for me was so great that he did what he could to implicate me, his brother, in the murder. The hat was his last mean trick, Lieutenant."

"Hm. Of course, the last thing he'd expect would be your inspiration to assume his personality and his financial powers?"

"Exactly." He hung his head. "I

"I know it was wrong. I—I'm not a very strong character, I guess. I can't resist temptation. Same thing as my forgery rap," he finished, in a burst of ingenuousness.

Burke mused while the other officer stood squarely in the doorway, his eyes steadily upon Alan. "Of course," Burke said finally, "we haven't found your brother's body yet. If it is him. That would support your story. But—" he shot a look at Alan—"we certainly have your prints on file. Maybe you better come down to headquarters with us, anyway, Mr. Martels. That will be a definite check."

"I've heard some beauties in my time, Mr. Martels," he went on, "But this story of yours is in a class by itself."

"But you just said . . ."

"I can't find any holes in it, either." As Alan relaxed again, he smiled grimly. "In the eyes of the law, Mr. Martels, you haven't committed a single crime—yet. Of course, if you'd forged your brother's name to anything, now, that would have been different . . ."

He looked at his watch. "Well, we'll go along and run a check on the prints."

"Gladly." Alan's voice was eager. "I'm as anxious as you to clear this up."

The tall detective smiled. "I'm sure you are." Then he halted. "Wait a minute. I'd better have a look around the house, first. Just for the record. Carney, stay with Mr. Martels."

"Right." The other man planted himself solidly in the doorway. "Why don't you sit down there, Mr. Martels, where we can see each other?"

Lieutenant Burke glanced around the hallway. His gaze fell on the study door, and he opened it and went into the room.

Alan sat down calmly to wait. Sounds of drawers opening and closing, of objects being set down on tabletops, came from the study. Then Burke's voice called out: "Mr. Martels! Will you step in here a minute?"

As Alan and Carney came through the doorway, he was examining a large, square package in brown wrapping-paper. If he noticed Alan's small but perceptible start at sight of it, he gave no sign that he had. Alan was smiling easily as Burke asked: "What's this, Mr. Martels?"

"Nothing very interesting, Lieutenant. A goldfish bowl."

"Goldfish bowl?"

"Yes. My brother fancied tropical fish. You can see several tanks of them in his room upstairs."

"Mm. Never cared for 'em myself, but it takes all kinds." He set the package on the floor, and half turned away.

"Seems to have just come from the store," he murmured thoughtfully. "How did you know it was a goldfish bowl, Mr. Martels? You didn't have it sent out, did you . . . ?"

Alan stumbled for a moment. "Why—that is, I heard Walter talking to someone over the phone about

it—ordering it."

"I see. When was that?"

"Why—" he seemed to ponder.

"On Friday, I think. Look, if you don't believe . . ."

"Oh, certainly, certainly. Just trying to establish your brother's movements up to the time he left here for Miss Winters' place."

He jounced the box between his hands, smiled slightly. "Kind of a solid bowl, at that."

"If you're getting at anything, Lieutenant," Alan Martels said, "come out with it." He stared Burke straight in the eyes.

Burke continued to smile, a frank, straightforward expression.

"I'm not getting at anything, Mr. Martels. All I said was—"

"Well, what the hell *are* you getting at, then?" Alan's voice was ringing, harsh. He came to Burke's side in a single stride. "Let's clear this thing up, if something bothers

you!"

His hands rough and capable, he stripped the brown paper wrappings off the tall, square box. He spread the paper wide on the carpet around the base of the carton and, with a flourish, lifted the double pasteboard flaps which formed the top of the box.

"A goldfish bowl, as you see, Lieutenant," he said, with a ring of malice, looking at Burke's face.

Burke eyed the interior of the box.

"I see, Mr. Martels," he said. "I see—but it doesn't look to me much like a goldfish bowl. Don't move, Martels!"

A spasm of incomprehension mixed with fear traveled over Alan Martels' face. Taking his eyes from Burke's, he looked downward, into the pasteboard box.

Lying on a bed of excelsior, staring blankly up at Alan Martels, lay Walter Martels' head.

Fratricide by decapitation was the climax of "The Pasteboard Box", a "Suspense" story starring Joseph Cotten doing vocal gymnastics to play both brothers. After the show, Cotten remarked: "I hope I did all right. It was the first time I ever played twins, and I'm afraid I lost my head over it!"



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